



Topics: [Features](#), [Flexible Work](#), [Home Page - Features](#)

When a crisis decides your WFH policy

When crisis strikes, workplace models shift fast, prompting organisations to rethink whether rigid office mandates can withstand future disruptions.

Four governments across Asia did in one week what HR teams have been trying since the end of the pandemic.

Triggered by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and Iranian hits of oil and gas plants, the governments of Vietnam, the Philippines, Pakistan, and Thailand all issued directives in early March promoting flexible work in the public sector.

Nobody conducted an engagement survey. The choice was made by economic necessity, as Asia buys 60% of its oil from the Middle East, and the halt of shipments stresses the fuel reserves.

Vietnam is reported to have fewer than 20 days of reserves, and Pakistan just one month. This imposed work-from-home (WFH) rule surfaces the HR debate

between organisations that demand a full return to the office and employees who want greater flexibility.

If a geographical shock can rewrite the work model within days, should organisations reassess their full return-to-work plans and find a long-term balance?

This is a recurring pattern. When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Germany's climate minister Robert Habeck said, "Every kilometre not driven helps." Is this an opportune time for HR leaders to lead a strategic move to adapt the full work-from-office policy to be crisis-ready by adopting a hybrid model that will increase the employee value proposition, rather than an HR waiting to be overridden by the next external shock?

Some organisations in Asia are ready

- DBS Bank gave all its 41,000 employees globally the permanent right to work remotely up to 40% of the time. Offices were rebuilt into JoySpaces, activity-based environments designed with employee input.
- Fujitsu Japan moved its 80,000 employees to primarily remote work, cut its office footprint by half, and rebuilt what remained into functional hubs. Recognising that the informal exposure that builds careers needs to be designed, Fujitsu introduced structured in-person touchpoints for senior-junior interaction.
- Trip.com, China's largest online travel platform, has had a "3+2" hybrid model since 2022, allowing employees to work from home on Wednesdays and Fridays. The policy was designed following a six-month randomised controlled trial with over 1,600 employees, which found that hybrid employees were as productive as office-based peers, equally likely to be promoted, and that resignations fell by 33%.

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The personal development dilemma

One of the big concerns of flexible work is that junior employees miss out on development. Here is how these three organisations solved it in their unique way.

- DBS built career development into the infrastructure of its hybrid model from day one. The bank launched structured learning roadmaps tied to specific skills, created an AI-powered internal platform called iGrow that recommends personalised development paths based on each employee's profile, and committed to upskilling more than 8,000 employees in data, digital, and leadership skills.
- Fujitsu redesigned its remaining offices specifically to serve the functions that remote work cannot. Training programmes, including new employee onboarding, were moved to the office floor. Hubs were rebuilt as places where diverse employees gather, learn, and interact, with the explicit goal of fostering cross-generational exposure.
- Jennifer Cao, Head of Global Talent Growth Centre for Trip.com, and her team structured in-office days (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday) around collaboration, mentoring, learning, and team interaction, and protected remote days (Wednesday, Friday) for focused individual work. A January 2026 global hybrid work analysis cited Trip.com's randomised trial as the strongest available evidence that hybrid employees show no difference across nine performance review categories, including leadership, development, and innovation, with equal promotion rates.

The Strait of Hormuz will eventually reopen, and hopefully, peace will come. But what we have learned from the pandemic is that the next crisis will not announce itself. HR leaders who treat this moment as a strategic inflection point, rather than an operational disruption to manage, will build something that outlasts the emergency: a workforce model that retains talent, develops people, and keeps running when the world outside stops.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Avi Liran is an Author, Writer, C-Level Mentor, and one of [Asia's top motivational and inspirational keynote speakers](#). Avi is a thought leader and expert in creating delightful customer and employee experiences, fostering appreciation, and building authentic resilience.